# RESTORATION REVIEW

*Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"*

See Article "YES, WHAT IS TRUTH?"
Page 71

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**Volume 8, No. 4** **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **April 1966**

## WILL OUR MISSIONARIES CONVERT US?

Sometimes I present a lesson on *The Conversion of Peter* rather than the expected *The Conversion of Cornelius,* for the narrative in Acts 10 and 11 indicates that Cornelius converted Peter about as much as Peter converted Cornelius, though of course in a different way.

The same thing appears to be happening to many of our missionaries, for they are being influenced by their new environments in foreign fields as much as they are influencing those environments. This is good, for this makes for an adaptation that helps the missionary to incarnate himself in the people to whom he preaches. And it just may be that these missionaries will do their most important work in converting people when they get back home and begin teaching the Churches of Christ that sent them forth.

For a hundred years the Churches of Christ hardly had a missionary anywhere. True, as early as 1880 we had a missionary to the American Indians, R. W. Officer from Gainesville, Texas; and J. M. McCaleb went to Japan not long afterwards. But until recent years we had virtually no missionary-consciousness at all. Now we have upward of 250 families in foreign fields. I am speaking only of non-instrument Churches of Christ, not Disciples or Independents. And it is what is happening to these men that promises to be among our greatest blessings of tomorrow, for we can believe that they will come home to convert us to the deeper meanings of God's grace and to the fulness of Christian fellowship.

These men and women in foreign fields are learning that the superficial externals of orthodoxy that are appealing to fear-ridden "Christians" will not work among pagans that are seeking the things that matter most. What works among our unenlightened brethren falls flat among the enlightened heathen! In his *An Uncertain Sound* Don Haymes publishes a letter from a missionary in Southeast Asia who explains that the preaching one hears "in a country church in Tennessee, complete with illustrations" kills any chance to reach the Buddhist culture. He tells of his desire to build churches "that would meet the

demands of a Buddhist society" and that would be free of "the perversions that have developed in our church of Christ tradition." But this has created an awkward situation for him since the older missionaries are of the old school. He describes one of them: "The natives do not like him or respect him. He gives them no spiritual food to grow on … All his sermons are on how everybody else is wrong and how we are right … He is a magnification of the missionaries who have taught him."

The missionary goes on to explain that a number of the workers in this field become discouraged. He thinks he knows why: "Part of the problem comes from their own lack of deep understanding of the society they are in and their foolish assumption that a gospel of anti-denominationalism and of forced church attendance will revolutionize the lives of anyone, especially Buddhists."

There are many such letters and articles from foreign fields that indicate that a lot of thinking and soulsearching is going on, for our men are learning that the ideas and methods that maintain the *status quo* in Nashville and Dallas fall flat in Hong Kong and Bangkok. They soon learn that their thinking must transcend the level of why we don't use instrumental music or why missionary societies are wrong. They are beginning to find a fresh approach to the Old Story, like Paul did at Athens, thus adapting themselves and their message to the people. What a blessing for these fellows to get away from Texas and Tennessee! It will make a difference when these fellows start coming back to the churches in the States, while others take their foreign posts. We may get ourselves converted!

When that happens we'll start hearing more about the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, for in these hard fields away from the insipid source of orthodoxy, these men drink more deeply of spiritual things. We will also see more cooperation with other churches, for the old fallacy of "the loyal church" loses its appeal 10,000 miles from home amidst people who cannot even appreciate the claim of Christ's unique sonship. And there will be more contact with "denominational preachers," for in the mission field the believers find it easier to bear with each other over doctrinal differences. They learn that fellowship does not imply agreement, and that they can work together for Christ in spite of their differences. Some may even come home and join the ministerial alliance in their community.

I am fully aware that some of the tragedy of our many divisions finds its way to mission points around the globe. A brother in Alabama writes of a visit to what is called an "anti" church. He noticed on the bulletin board a letter from a missionary in Africa, supported by the church he was visiting. The letter was informing the congregation that of the sixteen faithful workers who had been associated with the missionary that only four had remained faithful. The other twelve were adjudged no longer true to the gospel inasmuch as they had accepted the view that *it is* all right for the churches to support orphan homes.

And these are instances of missionaries who still cannot have anything to do with each other because of instrumental music or societies, even in pagan lands. But still I am encouraged by what I see on the whole. The missionary experience is a maturing one, and it cannot help but inspire our workers. I am especially pleased that many college students are being attracted to the various mission fields at home and abroad. It seems that the so-called "Exodus churches" are simply better churches, more spiritual and more intelligent. Out at Pepperdine College in Los Angeles that have a group of "Brazil Nuts" that are preparing to enter Brazil—something like 200 of them!

While I am gratified at the prospect of the good these people will do for Christianity in Brazil, I am especially happy over the prospect of what Brazil will do for them, and the good they in turn will do for us once they return home. If indeed Cornelius converted Peter, as well as Peter converted Cornelius, it may be that our missionaries whom we send out to convert the heathen will one day return home to convert us.

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## HOORAY! I FOUND IT AT LAST!

Honestly, I didn't think I'd find it in the *Gospel Guardian.* Not that there is anything wrong with the *Guardian.* I had about concluded that I would never see it in my lifetime, bur sure enough there it was in an article by William E. Wallace (bless him!), and it came at a time when I least expected it. They are calling that serendipity these days. It came when I was giving a major exam in "Philosophies Men Live By" at the university, and since the test was to run all hour, I gathered up a few items to read while I sat through the test, one of them being the *Guardian.* When I saw what I have been looking for these many years, I let out such an ejaculation of surprise and joy that my thirty students raised their heads as one, wondering what had so excited their professor.

In the same issue of the *Guardian* the editor had spun out a rather lengthy treatment of his experiences with Leroy Garrett over the past thirteen years, which included an appreciative reference to one of my recent editorials, as well as some ungracious comments about my "ultra liberal philosophy" and a rank misstatement of my position on fellowship. If the editor had been quoting most anyone else, he would have done so without feeling obligated to attend it with such a sordid introduction. And he had to assure his readers that he only "happened to be reading" my paper, which "he graciously sends me." He could have explained that he receives it on exchange basis, as he has for years, but I suppose he did not want his readers to think he pays me that much mind. And if you are going to quote something from a renegade brother like me, the *Guardian* editor shows you how: "But with all of Brother Garrett's leftfield liberalism, he hits a note now and then

that really rings true. I was particularly impressed with a recent editorial …" Now isn't that gracious and brotherly! Had he been honoring an editorial by an atheist, Methodist, or Hindu, he would not have bothered to take a wild slap at the man *first.* Why? Is it that if you commend something that Leroy Garrett has written you have to do so in such a way as not to implicate yourself? So if you dare to say something that is in the least commendatory, be sure to *attack* also. Oh, the bondage that men get themselves into!

But I have appeared as an apostate in the *Guardian* so often that it is "old hat" by now, so what really caught my fancy was a few lines from the pen of brother Wallace that brought my search to an end. Here they are: "John the apostle sums up the indictment against such Godless teachers as the God-Is-Dead theologians: 'Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.' (2 John 9)"

All these years I have seen 2 John 9 twisted, butchered, stretched, and abused. It is surely the most misapplied scripture of all those used frequently by our people. I had about given up hope of ever seeing it appropriately used, but at last I have found it in brother Wallace's article on the "God-is-dead" theologians, and I commend him for it.

Poor 2 John 9. It really catches it. It is applied to brethren who support Herald of Truth, use instrumental music, go to Sunday School, or have missionary societies. If a brother thinks it all right to use multiple cups in serving the Supper, there are those among us who will quote 2 John 9 and apply it to him: "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God." If a brother believes in the premilliennial return of Christ, or if a congregation puts an orphanage in its budget, 2 John 9 is wrapped around their digressive necks.

This passage goes on to read: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; for he who greets him shares his wicked work." This is made to apply to good, sincere brethren who happen to differ in some particular, and thus the line of fellowship" is drawn and divisions in the body of Christ occur. This means that the Sunday School or the sponsoring church is "a wicked work" that makes fellowship impossible. We bellow forth "Whosoever goes onward and abides not in the doctrine of Christ has not God" and apply it to some innocent brother who goes to church where there is an organ.

This we have done for years, thus imposing upon ourselves an impossible attitude toward those who see things differently from ourselves. A few minutes with most any commentary, or a careful look at the context, would have disabused our minds of such an interpretation of 2 John 9. John tells us in the verses before the kind of people he has in mind: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.' Some reading in background material will reveal that the apostle is dealing with the Gnostic heresy that was greatly troubling the church at this time.

The Gnostics were *within* the church, but believing as they did that matter is inherently evil, they could not accept the doctrine that the eternal Christ had taken on human flesh. They thus denied the incarnation. As MacKnight puts it: "The doctrine of Christ which the apostle had in his view here, I suppose, is the doctrine concerning Christ, that he is the Son of God sent into the world, made flesh to save mankind." As 1 John 2:23 says: "No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also." The man who does not have God, the apostle is saying, is he who denies the Father-Son relationship of Jesus the Christ.

It is so wrong to apply this passage to some well-meaning, Christ-loving Baptist who has confused some point of scripture. A man can be wrong about a lot of things and still have God. So long as a man sustains a proper relationship to the Christ, we can believe that "he has both the Father and the Son." But when, like the Gnostic heretics, he wishes to destroy people's faith through a perverted doctrine of the nature of Christ, he has neither the Father or the Son.

The "God-is-dead" theologians come about as near being like the ancient Gnostics as any group of professed Christians could be. Their teaching despoils the divine nature of the Christ. It denies the sonship of Christ, for it seeks to accept Christ without accepting the Father. It is therefore a threat to the faith. Of these men it can be properly said: "Anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God." If God is dead, if he is indeed not in the picture, then the Christ is necessarily denied. The denial of Christ is a denial of the Father; the denial of the Father is a denial of Christ. "I and the Father are one" says our Lord in John 10:30.

We commend the *Guardian* for their proper application of 2 John 9. We hope this will be a new beginning in responsible interpretation.

There remains the problem as to whether such professed Christians as the "God-is-dead" people are to be treated in such a manner as 2 John 10 directs, where we are told not to receive such ones into our home or bid them any greeting. Now I readily concede that the position of William Hamilton of Colgate and Thomas Altizer of Emory make Christian fellowship impossible, but I would hardly feel justified in closing the door in their faces should they call at my home, and I don't think 2 John 10 requires that, even when I admit that 2 John 9 applies to this case.

I agree with C. H. Dodd that 2 John 10 is an emergency regulation in the early church, a measure to protect the saints from the wandering heretics who were committed to the destruction of the faith. Emergency regulations are not to become permanent practices. Despite the seriousness of Hamilton's and Altizer's digression from the truth, I can treat them with Christian courtesy and entertain them in my home, all the time seeking to dissuade them from their "evil way"—*evil* because it is destructive of Christian faith. But in the time of John the Gnostic heresy was too perilous a problem for any chances to be

taken. And so, if a traveling teacher came through, and did not bring "this doctrine" (the truth about the nature of Christ), the saints could know that he was a Gnostic heretic, and was not to be shown any hospitality or in any way encouraged in his evil.

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*"How Vast the Resources of His Power …" No. 4*

## THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

From the inception of the Restoration Movement we have been a people somewhat like those that Paul encountered in Ephesus who had "not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit." Whether it is because of the complex nature of the subject or the radical views held by some of our religious neighbors, we have throughout our history been reluctant to say much about the Holy Spirit. Our vocabulary has always allowed such expressions as "by God's providence" or "according to the word of God," but we have avoided such terminology as "the leading of the Spirit."

Alexander Campbell certainly believed in the personality of the Holy Spirit, and yet his teaching on this subject was so coldly intellectual that he was understood to make the Spirit virtually equivalent to God. His insistence that "whatever the Word does in us the Spirit does", laid the Campbellites open to the charge that they believed that the Holy Spirit is nothing more than the Bible itself. And when he affirmed in the debate with Rice that "the Spirit of God operates on persons only through the Word," he further strengthened the misconception that he equated the Spirit with the Word.

Robert Richardson, Campbell's physician and biographer as well as fellow editor and teacher, is the one man among our pioneers who was unequivocally committed to the significant role of the Spirit in the life of the Christian. He urged Campbell not to argue in the Rice debate that the Spirit works only through the Word, and he and Campbell had some editorial skirmishes over his enthusiastic concern for the Holy Spirit. Campbell chided his physician for being "addicted to metaphors" when he spoke of the Spirit, while the doctor suggested that the senior editor had the *light* of the word without the *heat* of the Spirit, which was nothing better than *moonshine!*

Richardson insisted that it is only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that love, joy and peace can be cultivated. He believed that as a child of God grows in knowledge he should likewise grow in warmth of feeling and fervor of devotion. This comes by being poured full of the Spirit, or being baptized with the Spirit, which he believed is for every saint of God. He was convinced that it is only through the *spiritual baptism* that man can become one in Christ. Because of this he wrote more about the Spirit's mission of

enlightenment in the life of the Christian than any of our pioneers, and if his influence had obtained the disciples might have been known as “the people of the Spirit” as well as “the people of the Book.”

Being influenced as much as he was by Lockean empiricism, Campbell could hardly appreciate Richardson’s concern for heart-felt religion, and especially the doctor’s contention that feelings are even more important in religion than knowledge. And yet it is true that Campbell at various times said enough about the Spirit that it all added up to about the same thing that Richardson was saying, a fact that the doctor would not let him forget. For example, one question came to Campbell’s office that asked: “You speak of the Holy Spirit after baptism. Do you mean by the Holy Spirit what is commonly called the Holy Spirit; or do you mean a holy temper of mind effected by the mere word, by obedience to its requirements?”

That question came from Robert Semple, a longtime antagonist of the Campbell movement, and it reflects the prevailing attitude toward the Campbellite doctrine of the Spirit. But notice how Campbell replied to it:

> It is hard to say what is commonly meant by “the Holy Spirit.” But I mean, that not merely a holy temper of mind, but that Holy Spirit which dwelt in Jesus, that Spirit of God which animates the body of Christ, that promised Spirit which dwells in the church of the living God. This is the spirit of holiness which is received in consequence of our union with Christ, after we have put on Christ in immersion. (*Mill. Harb*. 1, p. 357)

Whatever we might quote from our pioneers it is evident that throughout our history we have not been known as a Spirit-filled people and our teaching on the Holy Spirit has been largely negative. We have been so preoccupied with proving that the Spirit does not operate in some mysterious way in the conversion of the sinner that we have failed to appreciate the spiritual resources of power in our own lives.

It is significant that when the gospel was first proclaimed at Pentecost the Holy Spirit was declared “the great promise” for both Jews and Gentiles.

“Peter told them, ‘You must repent and everyone of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that you may have your sins forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this great promise is for you and your children—yes, and for all who are far away, for as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself:” (Acts 2:38-39, Phillips)

It is clear here that the Holy Spirit is bestowed as a heavenly gift upon all repentant and baptized souls. The Spirit is Himself the gift, *the great promise* that God had long intended for both Jews and Gentiles, so that all men might come into communion with God through Christ. This is the work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian, to bring him into communion with God. “The guarantee of our living in him and his living in us is the share of his own Spirit which he gives us.” (l John 4:13)

That the Holy Spirit is Himself given to the believer is clearly stated in several passages:

"And we are witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to them that obey him:' (Acts 5:32)

"God has also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts:' (2 Cor. 1:21)

"God has given us his Holy Spirit." (l Thess. 4:8)

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Lk. 11:13)

Paul also speaks of the Holy Spirit as "the promise," pointing out the purpose of the promise:

"And after you gave your confidence to him you were, so to speak, stamped with the promised Holy Spirit as a guarantee of purchase, until the day when God completes the redemption of what he has paid for as His own; and that will again be to the praise of his glory:' (Eph. 1:1314, Phillips)

By "the redemption of what he has paid as His own" the apostle is referring to the Christian himself, who has been purchased by the death of the Christ. As Phillips translates 1 Cor. 6:20: "You have been bought, and at what a price!"

Yes, we have indeed been purchased, and so we are not our own; but we have not yet been redeemed, at least not in the fullest sense. Thus Paul says in Rom. 8:23: "And it is plain, too, that we who have a foretaste of the Spirit are in a state of painful tension, while we wait for that redemption of our bodies which will mean that at last we have realized our full sonship in him." (Phillips)

The gift of the Holy Spirit is thus related to "the day of redemption." "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." (Eph. 4:30)

These verses tell us that our bodies have been purchased, but not redeemed, and that the Holy Spirit is given as an assurance or guarantee that redemption (receiving of an immortal body) will indeed come. So Paul says in 2 Cor. 1:22: "God has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

So we can see that there are important reasons for the gift of the Holy Spirit. And these reasons go beyond the fact that the Spirit serves as a down payment on eternal glory. While we can think of "the fortaste of the Spirit" in all its preciousness, there are other vital functions of the Spirit that have to do with the warp and woof of everyday life.

One of these functions is *consolation.* The Spirit, who dwells within the believer, is an ever-present helper in our weakness. Notice Rom. 8:26-27: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what

is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Surely we can believe that the apostle, who spoke of being "afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed," found the strength to endure by the great resource of power that was his by the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit not only spoke to Paul, both encouraging him and instructing him; but He also spoke to the Father in behalf of the apostle. Paul, like ourselves, had that experience of not knowing how to pray as we ought. This may be the case *all* the time, since our efforts to communicate with the Ruler of the Universe can hardly be anything but weak, but it is certainly the case when we are burdened with grief and worry, when life's problems stack up on us in such a way that all seems lost.

It seems too good to be true that there is a heavenly Guest who is our constant companion, dwelling within us, who knows the language of heaven and the angels, and who intercedes for us "on those agonizing longings which never find words." What a thrill to think of the Comforter praying for us in a heavenly language that only God can understand. Phillips gives it this way: "And God who knows the heart's secrets understands, of course, the Spirit's intention as he prays for those who love God."

This frees us from the superficial view that the Holy Spirit is some kind of hazy, mystical "it" that emanates from God in some fashion wholly unrelated to our busy lives. We see Him here as a heavenly Guest, living within us and praying for us in time of trouble, and helping us in our weakness.

The indwelling Spirit also serves to illumine our minds and inspire our imagination. The psalmists prayer, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," can mean much to us in Bible study as we yield ourselves to the guidance of the Spirit. In Eph. 1:15-18 the apostle refers to "spiritual wisdom and the insight to know more of him" and to the "inner illumination of the spirit." It is not too much to say that our inner eyes (our mind or spirit) become enlightened by the Spirit's influence. Otherwise *spiritual* wisdom would have little meaning. One might know many scriptures by memory and yet be void of inner illumination.

In this connection notice 1 Cor. 2:12: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." It is remarkable how Paul says we receive the Holy Spirit *so that we might understand.* He goes on to say in verse 14: "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Is this not plainly saying that if a man does not have the Holy Spirit as a helper he cannot understand the things of God?

Paul refers more than once to our "walking according to the Spirit," and it may be a mistake for us to say this simply means to find out what the Bible says and do it. The churches to whom the apostle addressed such instruction did not have the New Testament scriptures as we have. But they did have the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which would be the "inner illumination" that might come in numerous ways: by the study of what few scriptures they did have, especially the Old Testament literature; but also by apostolic letters and instructions and their own conversations with each other, or simply by what we call intuition. As we pray for light some things might "come to us" intuitively. It might be in poetry (see Acts 17:28) or in the reading of history that the Spirit would speak to us, or He might speak to us through a friend or even an enemy, or perhaps in nature. David found such inspiration as he watched the stars (Psalms 8).

If we do enjoy the Spirit as a heavenly Guest within us, and if we walk by Him and are led by Him, we are indeed the sons of God, and we wear the family likeness. The Spirit thus bears fruit in our lives, dwelling within us as He does. Paul lists these in Gal. 5:33 as being "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self - control." These are not *our* works but the Spirit's fruit. As we become Spirit-filled and Spirit-led, and as we "pray at all times in the Spirit" (Eph, 6:18) the harvest of love, joy and peace are as natural as it is for a fig tree to yield figs.

Beyond this we could speak of *special* gifts of the Spirit, which would include the gifts of wisdom, healing, working of miracles, tongues, and other things mentioned in 1 Cor. 12 and elsewhere, which have certainly had an important function in the life of the church, and may still have. But we will not pursue this part of the subject any further in this study, except to emphasize that we consider these gifts as *special* gifts for particular purposes, while the gift of the Spirit Himself is for all Christians.

The blessed Lord has therefore fulfilled His promise to the disciples: "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you." (John 14:18) He has come to us in the Holy Spirit. And so Paul could say: "The Lord is the Spirit." (2 Cor. 3:17)

We must not therefore behave as if we were alone in this world. He is with us. He dwells within us and we dwell within Him. What a vast resource of power this is that God has made available to us. —*the Editor*

This is one of a series of lessons on "Resources of Power." At the end of this year all ten issues of this journal will be bound in an attractive book with dust jacket with the title *Resources of Power.* The price will be moderate. You should reserve your copy now by writing to us.

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## YES, WHAT IS TRUTH?

CURTIS LYDIC

Pilate was not merely making conversation with Jesus when he asked that now famous question. He perhaps thought that Jesus was using the word too casually. Many people do, and it always grieves a thoughtful person to observe someone treating a profound idea in a light, easy way. Pilate was not prepared to appreciate Jesus' meaning, but his question shows that he did appreciate the difficulty of defining *truth.* It would be good if all Christians appreciated the problem as Pilate did; but the fact is that many of us have been guilty of tossing the word back and forth in a somewhat irresponsible way.

For example, one hears much talk about "standing up for" and "contending for" the truth. There is something to be said in favor of such an idea; Jude admonished his readers to "contend" for the faith. Probably, however, we have abused this concept in our strenuous efforts to establish our own point of view with respect to doctrine. We have equated "truth" with our "position" in matters of doctrine, and have often acted heretically in so doing.

We have said of those whose doctrinal understanding was identical to our own that they "have the truth." Comparing ourselves as a church with other denominations, our distinction is, supposedly, that we "have the truth," meaning that we are right on baptism, instrumental music, organization, items of worship, non-use of clerical titles, etc., etc. The Pharisees spoke very similarly during the time of Jesus sojourn among them, comparing themselves with other sects, and as Jews comparing themselves with Samaritans and Gentiles. But there were Gentiles (and they were the aliens, remember) who seemed to enjoy possession of truth more than any Pharisee, such as the Syrophoenician woman who begged Jesus for "the crumbs from the table." Similarly, I know people, Baptists, Presbyterians, members of the Christian Church, whose lives are a continuing display of the fruits of the Spirit, who seek in whatever they do to magnify God, and to hold up Jesus before their fellow men, who are instrumental in turning many hearts to the Lord. On the other hand, I have known many members-in-good-standing of the so-called "true church" who are carnal, materialistic, and self-indulgent so as to be quite unconvincing as Christians. Who, indeed, has the truth?

Jesus told Pilate that those who were "of the truth" heard His voice. The Pharisees, as doctrinally sound as they felt themselves to be, were standing outside Pilate's hall crying "Crucify him!" Who is "of the truth" today? How are we going to hear His voice when we are so busy preaching to others that we have no time to listen?

Many, perhaps most, of my brethren will agree with the points I have raised here. But I have seen such agreement before, and then have seen the same men go right on with the same offensive, thoughtless propaganda.

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## CUSTOM OR COMMAND — WHO DECIDES?

ROBERT MEYERS

This journal's effort to promote tolerance and understanding among Christian people can succeed only so far as its readers see with what preconditioned minds most of us read our Bibles and view the acts of religious groups unlike our own. It is only when a man finds out that he sees as he has been trained to see, through spectacles whose tint has been carefully created, that he begins to understand why other men see so differently.

When this happens he stands on the threshold of one of life's most humbling and rewarding experiences, ready to enter into fruitful relationships with his fellows. No longer needing to maintain the troublesome fiction that he is elect in being able to see clearly, while others only peer blindly, he can relax and ponder the fact that *every* man looks through the lens of his own peculiar prejudices. Chastened and strangely warmed in heart, he rejoins the human race and finds a wider fellowship than he had ever dared hope for.

All of us who hope for more understanding of other religious groups by Church of Christ members must hammer away at this theme until the carefully coached resistance to it dissolves. The average man—and it is he who will ultimately make or break our hopes—simply refuses to accept the idea that he interprets every line he reads or word he hears in terms of the pre-conditioning, the "mind set," with which he comes to it. Once he can be won to believe that he is involved in an action conditioned by everything he is, then soon or late he will see why no man or group call hold a monopoly on truth.

Like other people, we in the Church of Christ read things through the colored glasses of our own particular traditions. If we seem to see something that does not show quite the correct color, we ignore it. We are skilled at this, especially when we come to clear statements in the Bible which seem utterly foreign to our dogma and practice. In such moments we say easily, "Well, that was just a custom they had back then. It had some local and temporary importance, but times have changed and we express the same idea in a different way."

The rationale seems to be something like this: if *we* still do it, it was meant to be universal and permanent; if *we* don't do it, it was only a custom anyway and we need not be concerned with it. Thus we bind all practices which our traditions sanction, but easily dismiss other practices—even when phrased in identical language—which have played no part in our group history.

Unless we think that our religious group has some infallible means of deciding such matters we must ask an important question of ourselves. How do we know what is a custom and what is a lasting command? Certainly we find few guide lines in the New Testament. Writers do not bother to say, "This admonition is local and temporary and was

not meant to have permanent relevance for the church." Do we, then, bring reason and common sense to bear upon the problem?

If we admit this, we are in trouble at once because if our reason is imperfect, our interpretation may also be imperfect. What shall we do about those whose reasoning powers bring them to conclusions different from ours? Shall we predicate our right to salvation, our superiority in doctrine, on the basis of our superior reasoning powers? Who would dare to do so, yet is not this in effect what we have done?

Let us turn to specific cases and use the New English Bible for the plainest possible readings. Some admonitions in *James* 5 will serve as a good opener.

"Is anyone among you in trouble? He should turn to prayer." We have all been in trouble; we have all turned to prayer. We consider this quite sensible advice, universal and timeless in its relevance to the Christian world. We would urge it upon our neighbors.

"Is anyone in good heart? He should sing praises." We have all been happy; we have all sung out of that happiness. We are quite sure that the emotion and its appropriate expression may be urged upon anyone.

"Is one of you ill?" All of us have been at some time, some of us seriously. What advice is given? "He should send for the elders of the congregation to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord."

Now, abruptly, watch how we shift our ground. It is not a part of the Church of Christ tradition to send for elders to come and pray. We may telephone for the preacher to come, but it is a rare case indeed when even one elder, let alone several, may be summoned to a bedside. And certainly *we* do not expect them to anoint us with oil in the name of the Lord. Nor do we believe, without qualification, that "the prayer offered in faith will save the sick man," that "the Lord will raise him from his bed," and that "any sins he may have committed will be forgiven."

Isn't it interesting that we rely firmly on the first two "shoulds" and blithely consign the third one to limbo? "He should turn to prayer" —this is proper. "He should sing praises" —this is proper. "He should send for the elders to pray over him and anoint him with oil" —this is old-fashioned, a purely local custom, and has no relevance to modern church life.

Just how is it that we know this? Is it perhaps because *we do not send for the elders to pray and anoint,* therefore a verse which says send for them cannot "mean what it says"? Is our rationale simply this: since we don't practice it, it can't really be taken literally? Yet isn't it obvious that James had no notion the three actions would be differentiated, so that two have permanent relevance while the third has none?

Some promises in the New Testament we take very seriously. For example, the promise of forgiveness of sins after baptism, or the promise of being heard by God if our hearts are right in prayer. How have we decided that *this* promise in *James* about healing and forgiveness is not to be taken seriously?

Someone says, "Well, but we know that people had a *custom* (how we love that word when we need it!) in those days of anointing with oil. It had medicinal value, for one thing, and of course those were the days of miracles."

Oil did have medicinal value and was used for various ailments, along with other remedies. It was never considered a panacea, however, and since illness in general is the subject of James' remarks it seems clear that the anointing he has in mind has at least a quasi -sacrarnental nature. We should doubtless have admitted this long ago but for our hostility to any verse that seems to justify a Catholic ritual.

As for the miraculous, is there any hint at all that James considered the ceremony unusual? He gives the advice in the same quiet tone with which he delivers the other two admonitions. Far from being a miracle, it seems rather to have been thought commonplace. But we escape too easily by naming things as miracles. Is answer to prayer not a miracle? Is forgiveness of man's sins by a perfectly holy God not a miracle? It seems to me that one who can answer "no" to those questions has lost all sense of awe.

Since there is not even the barest hint that James thought one of his trio would be dropped, isn't it curious that the one we do drop is the very one on which he spent most of his time? Count the words given to the idea of praying in time of trouble and singing in time of joy and compare them with the words given to the idea of calling for elder prayers and anointings and the promise of results. There is at least a strong hint that James considered the last the *most important* of the three. To be in trouble seems mild compared with being on a sickbed and in need of both physical and spiritual healing. Yet this apostolic advice about sending for the elders and their anointing is completely ignored. Why?

We know, don't we? If it were a part of Church of Christ tradition to have elders anoint the sick and pray over them, we would box these verses in red ink and make them part of our arsenal of proof texts. Since they are the only clear words about the practice, they would become our bulwark, our supreme justification for obeying them. We would insist that others should do as we do, else be considered not Christians at all.

But since this practice dropped out somewhere along the line and never entered into our tradition, James' description of it stays primly on the page and never leaps out at us in boldface. So little affected are we by it that we not only disregard it ourselves but scoff at those who think they should take it seriously. We know that James' third comment in this section was only a custom, but *how* do we know it?

Let's try again. "But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that men may not see that you are fasting …" (Matthew 6) Jesus obviously thought his disciples would fast. He uses the same language he is quoted as using by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:25: "Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me." In each case He takes for granted that a certain action will be taken; all he specifies is the *attitude* which should accompany it. "When you fast" and "Whenever you drink" —the assumption of a continued action is identical. Jesus foresaw his disciples' fasting just as clearly as he foresaw their communing.

Have you fasted lately? As a *religious* ceremony? Someone says, "Well, but he was talking just to his immediate disciples; we weren't included." It might be interesting to see how often we cite words of Jesus to his immediate disciples and make them applicable to us today! Apparently our principle is to use what we need to explain what we do, or don't do" and simply keep very quiet about the rest.

But the argument that Matthew 6 and Matthew 9:15 apply only to immediate disciples and not to us will not hold water anyway. Our problem remains. We love to talk of Jesus as our example, especially when we see him being baptized. Since he is our example in Matthew 3:16 at the time of his baptism, is he also our example in Matthew 4:2 when he fasted forty days while wrestling with a serious spiritual problem? Would you recommend that a man with a momentous decision to make should follow his Lord and fast for an extended period so as to free his mind for clearest insights? Or would you explain to him that baptism was permanent and fasting was only a local custom?

But it is more embarrassing yet. In Acts 13:2 some prophets and teachers in the Antioch church fasted while they offered worship to the Lord. We love to talk of "the early church"; here is "the early church" in action and it is shown *combining* fasting and worship to the Lord. Have we ever done this? Have we ever approved while our minister spoke of how we should try to restore exactly the "pattern of the early church"? What would we think if he suggested seriously that *this* pattern be restored?

Somehow the answer must be that the *fasting* part was only a custom and meant to die out, while the *worship* part was timeless and meant never to die out, but wouldn't it have helped enormously if the writers of the New Testament had affixed an asterisk to all those practices which they knew were "just customs"?

Not only did these Antioch Christians combine fasting and worship in what appears to be an "approved example," but in the very midst of their action the Holy Spirit communicated with them. We cannot suppose that the Holy Spirit communicated with them while they were involved in error, so their combination of fasting and worship must have been all right. The Spirit told them that Barnabas and Paul should be separated to do some special mission work. What happens next? "Then, after further fasting and prayer, they laid their hands on them and let them go." Isn't it clear that fasting plays an important

role in this church's life and that we would stress it powerfully if it happened to be in our traditions?

Is this one of the examples of "the early church" which we must follow? Like not using mechanical instruments of music, for example? If it isn't, how are we to know *which* examples we must enforce upon ourselves and our neighbors, and which examples we can safely disregard as "just customs"? If we are reduced to confessing that we must use our common sense, then I repeat that this sets up a principle of interpreting which will ultimately destroy the authoritarian nature of the Church of Christ.

In Acts 14:2 3 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in various congregations "and with prayer and fasting committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith." Should we, when appointing elders, join fasting with our prayers? How is it that we have kept the praying and dropped the fasting? Is there a verse that says, "And whether there be fastings they shall cease"?

It is curious that when we find an example of one church celebrating the Lord's Supper on at least one Sunday we can turn this into a binding law for all believers in all times and places, but when we find repeated examples of congregations and individuals fasting we blithely disregard its having any lasting significance. Is it possible that this might seem peculiar to some objective, intelligent persons observing our actions?

Not only do we disregard "speaking where the Bible speaks" at this point, quite neglecting the practice of "the early church," but we compound our folly by making fun of those who *do* fast. We regard them as either hopelessly corrupt in doctrine, or else as amiable but bizarre eccentrics whose antics amuse us. The Church of Christ simply does not take fasting seriously. It never has, since its inception in the late nineteenth century, and this is undoubtedly why its members can glide so easily over all the passages about the value of fasting without once pausing to ask, "Say, why is it that *we* don't do this?"

We are people of a pattern, we say proudly. Yet we consistently neglect some parts of the pattern while we stress others. Jesus apparently disliked public religiosity. He not only urged that fasting be done quietly and unobtrusively, but he also said: "But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place …" (Matthew 6:6). Many of us in the Church of Christ would have to admit that we do very little secret praying, and almost none at all in a room with the door shut. It never ceases to amaze me that Paul's advice on contributing in 1 Corinthians 16 is made a law and an "item of worship," while Christ's advice on how to pray is so generally ignored.

Perhaps almost as important is the truth that the New Testament holds no clear sanction for public prayer by a leader. Such a practice cannot be found. But this does not perturb us. Just as we ignore the practices which *aren't* in our tradition, so do we face cheerfully the Scriptural silence about those which *are*. With our customary serenity we simply accept it that since we are used to having public prayers in the assembly, they are fine. That they are

not "specifically authorized" does not bother us as it does in the case of instrumental music. That they seem to have been viewed with grave suspicion by our Lord because of what they led to does not deter us. This is what we *do*, therefore this is nor to be questioned.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:19 that we should "not store up" treasure on earth. Do *we* store up treasure on earth? Have we any money in the bank? Better yet, have we any in savings? To be quite, quite honest, aren't we all much alike—we have a little in savings and wish mightily that we had more?

But is there any vagueness about this prohibition? "Do not store up"isn't that about as clear as "repent and be baptized"? Yet we interpret one to mean that anyone who isn't baptized is lost forever while we interpret the other to mean that at one time it wasn't right to store up treasure but it is now!

We are marvelous at evasions. Someone said to me, "Well, but notice that in those days the treasure got rusty and moth-eaten, so it wasn't safe. Now it is safe, so that means conditions have changed."

Do we argue, then, that because conditions have changed, the advice may be modified? What awful trouble we get into if we adopt *this* as our principle of interpretation. Our very life as a totalitarian body depends on our saying that advice in the New Testament must *never* be changed no matter how conditions may be altered. No matter how scarce water may be in the Sahara, or how unlikely that an Eskimo would get into it in sub-zero temperatures, we must not let this modify our interpretation of Mark 16:16.

No, we must drop this one quickly. It is useful only to avoid obeying Matthew 6:19, but it is dynamite when someone applies it to baptism or the elements of the Lord's Supper.

Crowded a bit, we reply: "Of course Jesus obviously didn't *literally* mean what he said in Matthew 6:19. He meant only that storing up treasure on earth shouldn't be our *primary goal."* The interpretation is lovely and convenient and one can almost hear the sigh of relief that follows it. The only problem is that it is not supportable. Jesus says not a word about "primary goals"; he simply says, "Do not store up treasure on earth:' If there is to be a modification, *we* have to supply it out of our common sense and our recognition of changed times. But if we can modify his advice here, how shall we stop some of our religious neighbors from modifying his advice elsewhere when it seems to conflict with their practice?

The whole point of this article is that we must recognize our own inconsistencies before we shall know how to approach the inconsistencies of others. Once we really understand the principles by which *we* interpret, we shall be in position to sympathize with those who differ with us because they have been trained to read with pre-conditioned

minds. Such a change in us can bring enormous dividends in improved human relationships. It is worth striving for.

How often we have seen an evangelist smashing a clenched fist into his palm and driving a Biblical "NOT" deep into every listener's head. "Forsake NOT the assembling of yourselves together!" "Except ye be born again ye shall NOT enter the kingdom of heaven!" No qualifications here. These "NOT's" mean exactly what they say. But can you imagine the same evangelist powerfully intoning, "Do NOT store up treasure on earth! "? The "NOT" in Matthew 6:19 really does not mean what it says at all. But we are confident that we know what it does mean and that we may safely interpret its language to accord with our practice.

Have we ever pitied the poor benighted "sectarian" who watches us leap dizzily from verse to verse, tagging the ones that "mean exactly what they say," and blacking out the ones that "mean something else besides what they say"?

Jesus gives similar advice in Matthew 6:34. "So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself." Do we accept this as it stands, without any modification or "interpreting"? Most certainly not! Most of us have bought insurance and wish we could afford more. We do *not* trust tomorrow to look after itself; we are going to do a little looking after it ourselves. As a matter of fact, so far are we from taking this verse "exactly as it stands, without adding to or taking from," that we now have some Church of Christ insurance companies formed with the express purpose of helping us all look after tomorrow!

The thought occurs disquietingly that some very literal-minded reader may suppose me to be arguing that all these verses *should* be interpreted quite literally. Not at all. I would agree with a non-literal reading of Matthew 6:34. I view it as a hyperbole which needs "interpretation" in the light of the twentieth century before it can beneficially be followed.

But just who is to decide such a thing? Who is to tell us when a statement, apparently clear and unequivocal, is to be interpreted flexibly? Whose "common sense" is to be enforced upon all believers? When we strip away all equivocation and come right down to naked fact, isn't it true that we have simply accepted our own corpus of interpretations and arbitrarily declared that none others are valid?

Suppose, for example, that some "sectarian" doesn't interpret 1 Cor. 16:1-2 in such a way as to rule out all other times and methods for supporting the work of the church. Do we extend to him the charity which we demand for ourselves in this matter of interpretation? Or do we assume that it is only we who can safely be trusted to know when to be literal, and just how literal to be?

If we want to consider other "neglected scriptures," we may think of several admonitions given in Matthew 5: "You are not to swear at all." "If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him your left." "If a man wants to sue you for your shirt, let

him have your coat as well." "Give when you are asked to give; and do not turn your back on a man who wants to borrow." Probably not a one of us follows these admonitions literally, even though we cannot be positive about the degree of literalness which our Lord meant to attach to them.

And despite 1 Timothy 2:8 our Christian ladies dress with elaborate hair styles and wear gold, pearls, and expensive clothing. We have been in congregations where the total value of all these items on a given day would surpass the total benevolent expenditures in that church for an entire year.

I am not recommending, therefore, that we all wear white muslin robes and leave off ornamentation. But if we can flexibly interpret 1 Timothy 2:8, despite its clear prohibitions, can we not at least muster up a little compassion for the man who disregards our labored conclusions about church music or frequency of communion?

Perhaps we should try sitting down to John 13 and reading it as if for the very first time. We might underline such comments as these: "Then if I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example: you are to do as I have done for you."

Have we considered what a treasured verse this would become if it read: "Then if I, your Lord and Master, have submitted to baptism, so also ought you to baptize one another"? Or, "Then if I, your Lord and Master, have sung only without an instrument, so also ought you to sing"? Every young man beginning to preach for us would memorize these words and work them into every sermon he delivered. They would be recited from lectureship podiums and graven in stone upon our buildings. We would feel that no "sectarian" could possibly resist their power and clarity.

But they only order us to wash one another's feet, and we are sure that times have changed, and besides we simply have no such practice as that in the Church of Christ. So we are positive that it is all right to disregard what Jesus said here, interpreting it in such a way as to square it with our twentieth century practices. Should we not be chastened?

I do not plead that people ignore the Bible. I plead rather for a recognition of the principles by which we interpret. We simply must ask ourselves why we insist so strongly on a rigidly literal interpretation in one place while we are amazingly elastic in others. If we learn that our *practice* influences our interpretation, then we are at least ready to look more compassionately upon our religious neighbors.

A dear friend of mine wrote the proper conclusion to this article when he printed his own poem in this journal more than two years ago. Imagining a typical authoritarian church member arguing with a "confused sectarian," he represents the former as saying:

You are to blame for not agreeing
That what I tell you is true.

You are to blame for not seeing
That my eyes can see for you.
I hear you say you are doing your best
To grasp what truth you can,
To serve God, you say, in little things,
To love your fellow-man.
But you are self-deceived, by Satan led,
A cursed child, hell-bent,
Because you fail to understand
That what I say is what He meant.

—*Friends University Wichita, Kansas*

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## BOOK NOTES

*Voices of Concern: A Critical Study of Church of Christism* by Robert Meyers will soon be off the press. If you have not reserved your copy, do so at once. Send no money. You will be billed for $3.50 when the book is mailed to you. Order at once. You must not miss this book.

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We are selling a number of Kee's *Making Ethical Decisions* for only $1.00. You'll be impressed with his chapter on "Everybody Does It-Why Shouldn't I?"

The best bargain on our shelf right now is James DeForest Murch's *Christians Only* in paperback for only $2.95. A 400-page history of the Restoration Movement, it has a chapter on Churches of Christ and current unity efforts, It even mentions this journal and

its editor. It begins in the Old Wodd and comes to America with the work of the Campbells and Barton Stone and comes on down to the present day with a chapter on "The Restoration Plea in an Ecumenical Era."

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